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Excerpt
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Introduction

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INTRODUCING THE QUESTION

At the last moment of Jesus' trial, the Matthean Passion Narrative adds a verse that has variously fueled anti-Judaism and disturbed commentators ever since: "Then the whole people answered: 'His blood be upon us and upon our children'" (καὶ ἀποκριθεὶς πᾶς ὁ λαὸς εἶπεν· τὸ αἷμα αὐτοῦ ἐφ' ἡμᾶς καὶ ἐπὶ τὰ τέκνα ἡμῶν, Matt 27:25).¹ The verse has become something of an interpretive crux. There is, on the one hand, the older and standard reading of the text: by this cry the people incur judgment, worked out in Matthew's scheme of things in the destruction of Jerusalem. Daniel Marguerat puts it starkly: "By this cry, Israel has wiped itself out of the history of salvation."² The vast majority of commentators agree; Matt 27:25 is part of a declaration of judgment – whether final, as Marguerat avers, or limited – against Israel.³ On the other

¹ Translations of the biblical texts are from the NRSV; where they differ from the NRSV they are my own. For the problem of anti-Judaism in relation to 27:25 see below, "Matt 27:25 and the *Intra-Muros/Extra-Muros* Debate." This passage and several others are taken from C. S. Hamilton, "'His Blood Be upon Us': Innocent Blood and the Death of Jesus in Matthew," *CBQ* 70.1 (2008): 82–100. I am grateful to Catholic Biblical Quarterly for permission to reproduce parts of that article in this monograph.

² Daniel Marguerat, *Le Jugement dans l'Évangile de Matthieu* (Le Monde de la Bible 6; 2nd ed.; Geneva: Labor et Fides, 1995), 376; citing S. Légasse, « L' « antijudaïsme » dans l'Évangile selon Matthieu, » in *L'Évangile selon Matthieu: Rédaction et théologie* (BETHL 29; ed. M. Didier et al.; Gembloux: Duculot, 1972), 417–28, here 424.

³ Commentators ancient and modern read Matt 27:25 as a declaration of judgment against Israel. Tertullian (*Adv. Jud.* 8.17–18 [CCSL 2.1363–64]) draws a straight line from this passage to the destruction of Jerusalem and the end of Judaism. Cf. Origen (*Comm. Matt.* 14 [PG 13.1236]). For final judgment among the moderns see David Hill, *The Gospel of Matthew* (NCB; London: Oliphants, 1972), 351; Eduard Schweizer, *The Good News according to Matthew* (trans. David E. Green; Atlanta: John Knox, 1975), 509; tentatively, Donald Senior, *The Passion Narrative according to Matthew: A Redactional Study* (BETL 39; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1975), 260; Francis Wright Beare, *The Gospel according to Matthew: Translation, Introduction and Commentary* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981), 460, 531; Nils A. Dahl, "The Passion Narrative in Matthew's Gospel," in *The Interpretation of Matthew*

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hand, there is the more recent “ironic” reading. Jesus, as the angel tells Joseph, is the one who saves his people from their sins (1:21); his blood is poured out, as he tells his disciples at supper, for the forgiveness of sins (26:28); when the people call down his blood upon their heads they therefore invoke, albeit unwittingly, their own salvation.⁴ Judgment here yields to redemption through the blood that saves.

What are we to make of these opposing interpretations? The two trace in Matthew’s Passion Narrative opposite themes: blood and destruction on the one hand; blood and forgiveness on the other. Both are coherent; in different ways both make sense of the Matthean context. That the same passage has given rise to readings thus diametrically opposed is curious. It suggests either that Matthew’s vision is at best ambiguous and at worst incoherent, or that there is a problem with the readings themselves. Is there a reading of the people’s cry that does justice both to the fate of Jerusalem in Matthew’s gospel and to the promise of salvation, precisely to “his people”?

(ed. Graham Stanton; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), 42–55, here 50; Robert H. Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Handbook for a Mixed Church under Persecution* (2nd ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 565. For limited judgment see Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew: A Commentary* (2 vols.; rev. and exp. ed.; Dallas: Word, 1990), 2.1034–35; Daniel J. Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew* (SacPag 1; Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1991), 390–93; David Garland, *Reading Matthew: A Literary and Theological Commentary on the First Gospel* (Reading the New Testament; New York: Crossroad, 1993), 258; Raymond E. Brown, *The Death of the Messiah: From Gethsemane to the Grave; A Commentary on the Passion Narratives in the Four Gospels* (2 vols.; ABRL; New York: Doubleday, 1994), 839; W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew* (3 vols.; ICC; Edinburgh: Clark, 1997), 3.591–92; Donald Senior (in a change of position from his 1975 study), *Matthew* (ANTC; Nashville: Abingdon, 1998), 325; Ulrich Luz, *Studies in Matthew* (trans. Rosemary Selle; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 249–50.

⁴ Timothy Cargal, “‘His Blood Be upon Us and upon Our Children’: A Matthean Double-Entendre?” *NTS* 37 (1991): 101–12. Cf. John Paul Heil, “The Blood of Jesus in Matthew: A Narrative-Critical Perspective,” *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 18 (1991): 117–24; idem, *The Death and Resurrection of Jesus: A Narrative-Critical Reading of Matthew 26–28* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991); Desmond Sullivan, “New Insights in Matthew 27:24–25,” *New Blackfriars* 73 (1992): 453–57; John T. Carroll and Joel B. Green, et al., *The Death of Jesus in Early Christianity* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1995), 48; Warren Carter, *Matthew and the Margins: A Sociopolitical and Religious Reading* (The Bible and Liberation Series; 2nd printing; Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2000/2001), 529. Amy-Jill Levine seems to have suggested the ironic reading first, without developing the point: *The Social and Ethnic Dimensions of Matthean Salvation History* (Studies in the Bible and Early Christianity 14; Lewiston/Queenston: Edwin Mellen, 1988), 269.

Matt 27:25 and the *Intra-Muros/Extra-Muros* Debate

The question is important not only for a coherent reading of the Gospel, but because the passage has a large footprint in Matthean scholarship; the question of its import is tied to assessments of the Gospel's attitude toward contemporary Judaism and (in turn) its social location.⁵ The debate about Matthew's social location has been formulated in terms of an opposition between *intra-muros* and *extra-muros* positions: is Matthew still to some degree within the boundaries of contemporary Judaism or definitively outside it?⁶ If, as the consensus now holds, the Judaism of Matthew's day is in a period of flux after the loss of the temple and the destruction of Jerusalem, so that various visions for the future of the Jewish people are emerging, where is Matthew's vision located in relation to this "formative" Judaism?⁷ The cry of the people in 27:25 plays a significant role in these assessments of Matthew. It is seen to be central to Matthew's attitude to Israel and to the question of Matthew's social location – and rightly so, for it is climactic. It stands at the decisive moment of Jesus' trial: with these words the fate of Jesus is decided. Thus it forms the high point in the narrative arc: the conflict between Jesus and his opponents is here resolved; from this moment on, the action turns toward the cross. Structurally, therefore, the verse demands attention, while the image of blood upon the heads of "the whole people" raises vividly the question precisely of the place of Israel in Matthew's vision.

Those scholars who read in Matt 27:25 a declaration of judgment against Israel *tout court* read in it also, for the most part, evidence of separation between Matthew's community and formative Judaism. Indeed, for some this verse constitutes the climactic statement of that separation. The scene is a kind of historical reconstruction (a hostile

⁵ See Terence Donaldson's useful discussion of divergent readings of Matt 27:25 and Matthew's relation to Judaism in *Jews and Anti-Judaism in the New Testament: Decision Points and Divergent Interpretations* (London: SPCK/Waco: Baylor, 2010), 30–54.

⁶ For a helpful introduction to the range of *intra-* and *extra-muros* positions see Donaldson, *Jews and Anti-Judaism*, 46–50. See also Anders Runesson, "Rethinking Early Jewish-Christian Relations: Matthean Community History as Pharisaic Intragroup Conflict," *JBL* 127 (2008): 95–132, esp. 96–97 n. 3; Graham Stanton, *A Gospel for a New People: Studies in Matthew* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1992), 113–45.

⁷ On formative Judaism see especially J. Andrew Overman, *Matthew's Gospel and Formative Judaism* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990).

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fiction, in Beare's words),⁸ reflecting Matthew's own situation vis-à-vis the contemporary Jewish community: the words arise out of and reflect not only tension, but hostility and division between the Jewish community and Matthew's emerging Christian community. The question is focused by the problem of anti-Judaism.⁹ In Matthew's declaration of judgment and rejection, these scholars hold, there is a condemnation of Judaism springing from painful separation, a condemnation that has given rise to a long and brutal history of anti-Semitism. As Gundry puts it, Matthew here "heaps blame on the Jews," revealing an anti-Judaism that will come to facilitate later violence and hostility against the Jewish people.¹⁰

Though these scholars concur in placing Matthew over against the Judaism of his day, they differ as to the degree of separation between communities. K. W. Clark and Lloyd Gaston represent the extreme *extra-muros* position. They argue that Matthew's gospel depicts the final rejection of Israel with such force it could only have been written by a Gentile.¹¹ "This gentile bias is the primary theme in Matthew," Clark writes. "The Jews as a people are no longer the object of God's salvation."¹² Gaston concurs: "Israel rejected her Messiah, therefore God has rejected Israel."¹³ The contrast between

⁸ Beare, *Matthew*, 531.

⁹ See Donaldson, *Jews and Anti-Judaism*, 30–32 (with references) for the centrality of Matt 27:24–25 in analyses of anti-Judaism and the Gospel.

¹⁰ Gundry, *Matthew*, 565. Cf. Ulrich Luz, *The Theology of the Gospel of Matthew* (trans. J. Bradford Robinson; Cambridge University Press, 1993), 146. R. E. Brown (*Death of the Messiah*, 831 n. 22), citing R. Pfisterer ("Sein Blut komme über uns. . .") in *Christen und Juden: Ihr Gegenüber vom Apostelkonzil bis heute* [ed. Wolf-Dieter Marsch and Karl Thieme; Mainz: Grünewald, 1961]: 19–37), states that the verse has been the "*locus classicus* for establishing God's rejection of Israel" since the fourth century. Already Origen (*Comm. Matt.* 14 [PG 13.1236]) sees in the verse the "unseemly" thing that causes Jesus to issue Israel a writ of divorce. Compare Marguerat (*Le Jugement*, 376; see above n. 2). It is worth noting that the anti-Jewish reading was not universal in the early church. Chrysostom, for all his fulminations against Judaizing Christians, sees in this passage not the condemnation of Israel but an opportunity for the mercy of God (*Hom. Matt.* 86.2 [PG 58.766]).

¹¹ Kenneth W. Clark, "The Gentile Bias in Matthew," *JBL* 66 (1947): 165–72; Samuel Sandmel, *A Jewish Understanding of the New Testament* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1956); Sjef van Tilborg, *The Jewish Leaders in Matthew* (Leiden: Brill, 1972); Lloyd Gaston, "The Messiah of Israel as Teacher of the Gentiles," *Int* 29 (1975): 24–40; Michael J. Cook, "Interpreting 'Pro-Jewish' Passages in Matthew," *HUCA* 54 (1983): 135–46. For similar views among the Germans, see Wolfgang Trilling, *Das Wahre Israel: Studien zur Theologie des Matthäus-Evangeliums* (3rd ed.; Munich: Kosel-Verlag, 1964); F. Georg Strecker, "The Concept of History in Matthew," *JAAR* 35 (1967): 219–30.

¹² Clark, "Gentile Bias," 166.

¹³ Gaston, "Messiah," 31–32, citation 32.

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the cry of the people in Matt 27:25 and the Gentile centurion's confession of faith reveals Matthew's Gentile location and hostility to Judaism.¹⁴

Others read in the Gospel the rejection of Israel and its replacement by the church – evidence, that is, of definitive separation from Judaism – but Jewish authorship, Jewish membership in the Matthean community, and to some degree continued concern for Israel. Kingsbury represents this mediating *extra-muros* view. For Matthew, Kingsbury says, “contemporary Judaism was, as a saying of Jesus puts it, a ‘plant which my heavenly Father has not planted [and] will be rooted up’ (15:13).”¹⁵ In 27:25, by Kingsbury's reading, the Jewish leaders and crowds reject God's Messiah and “call down God's wrath on themselves and their nation.”¹⁶ The real readers of Matthew's gospel were Jewish and Gentile Christians “no longer within Judaism but outside it,” yet they lived in close proximity to Jews and engaged in mission among them.¹⁷ Meier concurs: in “[t]his formal rejection of Jesus by the Jews” (i.e. Matt 27:25), “[t]he Kingdom of God is taken from this people and given to another people, the church.” The church is a Jewish-Christian community separated from the synagogue.¹⁸ Thus in one (broad) trajectory of interpretation the interchange between Pilate and the people in 27:24–25 reveals a Matthean theology in which judgment follows upon Israel's rejection of God and constitutes God's rejection of Israel. It is a theology that indicates separation between the Matthean community and contemporary Judaism (whether the Matthean community is entirely Gentile or still in part Jewish) and that is in its effects (and, for some, in intent) anti-Judaic.

At the opposite pole in the *intra/extra-muros* debate are Andrew Overman and Anthony J. Saldarini: Matthew's outlook and practice

¹⁴ Gaston, *ibid.*, 32.

¹⁵ Kingsbury, *Matthew as Story* (2nd ed.; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988), 128. So also Gundry, *Matthew*, 605.

¹⁶ Kingsbury, *ibid.*, 93. Cf. Kingsbury, *Matthew: Structure, Christology, Kingdom* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975), 153.

¹⁷ Kingsbury, *ibid.*, 127.

¹⁸ John P. Meier, *The Vision of Matthew: Christ, Church and Morality in the First Gospel* (New York: Paulist Press, 1979), 199–200. See also Wayne Meeks, “Breaking Away: Three New Testament Pictures of Christianity's Separation from the Jewish Communities,” in *To See Ourselves as Others See Us: Christians, Jews, “Others” in Late Antiquity* (ed. J. Neusner and E. S. Frerichs; Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1985), 93–116; Kingsbury, *Matthew as Story* and *Matthew: Structure, Christology, Kingdom*; Gundry, *Matthew*; Luz, *Theology of the Gospel of Matthew*; Stanton, *Gospel for a New People*, esp. 124.

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are thoroughly Jewish. Far from describing the rejection of Israel, Saldarini argues, Matthew sees Jesus as a reforming prophet and kingly leader “at the center of Judaism”; these are Jewish followers of Jesus for whom Israel and the Jewish people stand at the center of the story.¹⁹ For this view too, as for the *extra-muros* view, there is a mediating position, one that finds in Matthew some evidence of self-differentiation from central aspects of formative Judaism but also identification with Israel.²⁰ These readings deal with Matt 27:25 by seeing in it a limited “judgment and rejection” theme. Donaldson is representative: the Jewish opponents of Jesus, chiefly the Jewish leaders, have in Matthean thought been rejected by God. Yet “it is overstepping the evidence to say that Matthew views Israel as a monolithic whole that has been rejected as a *massa perditionis* in favour of a Gentile Church.”²¹ Matt 27:25, Saldarini states, describes the destruction of Jerusalem as judgment upon “an actual political and social segment of Jerusalem, not the people of Israel as a symbolic whole” and explains “to his own Jewish subcommunity” the opposition they experience from the Jewish community leadership.²²

By this reading, Matthew cannot accurately be called anti-Jewish, in part because the Gospel (and Matt 27:25) does not describe

¹⁹ Anthony J. Saldarini, *Matthew's Christian-Jewish Community* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 54. So also J. Andrew Overman, *Church and Community in Crisis: The Gospel according to Matthew* (The New Testament in Context; Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1996), esp. 9 and *Matthew's Gospel* – though note Stanton's caution (*Gospel for a New People*, 123 n. 2); Overman in *Matthew's Gospel* is not always consistent; some of his comments suggest a distinction between Matthew's community and “formative Judaism.” Runesson (“Rethinking,” 95–132) argues that the Gospel describes a situation of intra-Jewish conflict with Pharisaic groups in particular; cf. Runesson, “Behind the Gospel of Matthew: Radical Pharisees in Post-War Galilee?” *Currents in Theology and Mission* 376 (2010): 460.

²⁰ See for example Gunther Bornkamm, “End-Expectation and Church in Matthew,” in *Tradition and Interpretation in Matthew* (ed. Günther Bornkamm, Gerhard Barth and Heinz Joachim Held; trans. Percy Scott; London: SCM, 1963), 15–51; Terence Donaldson, *Jesus on the Mountain: A Study in Matthean Theology* (JSNTSup 8; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1985); Alan Segal, “Matthew's Jewish Voice,” in *Social History of the Matthean Community: Cross-Disciplinary Approaches* (ed. David Balch; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 3–37; Ben Witherington III, *Matthew* (Macon, GA: Smyth and Helwys, 2006).

²¹ Donaldson, *Jesus on the Mountain*, 206–07. Cf. Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 3.282–309; 591–92; 695–97; Carter, *Matthew: Storyteller, Interpreter, Evangelist* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996), 229–41; Overman, *Church and Community*, 383.

²² Saldarini, *ibid.*, 33. Cf. Carter, *Matthew and the Margins*, 528; Paul S. Minear, *Matthew: The Teacher's Gospel* (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1982), 135–36; Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 3.591–92; Overman, *Church and Community in Crisis*, 382–84.

condemnation or rejection of Israel as a whole, but only of a particular subgroup within Israel (the religious leaders; the Pharisees), and in part because Matthew's community itself was part of the contemporary face of Judaism, one of a variety of groups which together constituted "formative" or "common" Judaism. "The crises and questions that provoked the Gospel in the first place [are] the struggles and tensions within and among competing Judaisms in Palestine in the late first century."²³ The corollary of this view is that anti-Jewish readings of the Gospel and of 27:25 in particular are indefensible. Warren Carter puts it forcefully:

Christian interpretations of 27:25 have propagated a virulent anti-Judaism by claiming that the saying attests Israel's rejection of God's anointed and God's permanent rejection of Israel. Such attempts are textually unsustainable and morally and religiously repugnant . . . The gospel does not propose for a moment the permanent rejection of all Jewish people.²⁴

Is Matt 27:25, then – and Matthew's gospel as a whole – anti-Jewish, describing the rejection of Israel (and locating Matthew's community outside Judaism to some degree)? Or is such a reading of 27:25 "textually unsustainable"? Is Matthew in fact intimately involved with first-century Judaism, revealing in his Gospel a passionate concern for the future of Israel? Timothy Cargal offers a literary solution to the problem. He attempts to reconcile the Gospel's promise of salvation to the people (1:21) with the blood upon the heads of the people (27:25) by means of the blood of Jesus poured out, in 26:28, for forgiveness. In this narrative context, Matt 27:25 is ironic: in calling down the blood of Jesus upon their heads the people unwittingly invoke their own salvation. Far from being hostile to Judaism (Cargal concludes), Matt 27:25 evidences a deep concern for Israel and its future as the people of God.²⁵

It is noteworthy, however, that although the ironic reading complements the *intra-muros* perspective, it has not been marshaled

²³ Overman, *Church and Community*, 26.

²⁴ Carter, *Matthew and the Margins*, 528–29.

²⁵ Cargal, "His Blood Be upon Us," 101–12. Carter (*Matthew and the Margins*, 529) appends the ironic reading's promise of forgiveness to his "limited judgment" reading. His main point, however, is that 27:25 refers only to a subgroup.

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in its defense. The problem with the ironic reading, Davies and Allison observe, is that it does not adequately take account of the ominous overtones of the people's cry: "the text nurtures the feeling of tragedy"; "to invoke 26.28 and urge that the crowd, despite itself, is calling for the blood of Jesus to cover its sins . . . goes against the context."²⁶ Davies and Allison, with the majority of commentators holding the *intra-muros* view, adopt instead the "limited judgment" reading. It is not all Israel that is here at issue for condemnation or for destruction; the passage points only to the destruction of 70 CE, and makes it clear that it is the leaders and not the people as a whole who are responsible.²⁷

Davies and Allison are right to note that the passage points to tragedy: "his blood be upon us" speaks, in the context of the demand for the crucifixion of "this righteous man," of doom and not of joy.²⁸ Yet their "limited judgment" reading also, arguably, goes against the context. Matthew brings the passage to a climax in the words not of the leaders but of "the whole people." The meaning of this phrase is hotly debated; we note here (in anticipation of the fuller discussion in Chapter 8) two points which on the level of Matthew's composition are compelling.²⁹ Matthew shifts at precisely this moment from the word ὄχλος, which he has used up to this point to describe the crowds at the trial, to λαός. This is the term, here, which makes his point.

Secondly, the phrase πᾶς ὁ λαός occurs repeatedly in the Hebrew Scriptures to describe the people of God as a whole. In Deuteronomy at the brink of entry into the promised land "the whole people" say amen (twelve times) to the proclamation of blessing and curse that

²⁶ Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 592. ²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ For the ominous character of the words "his blood be upon us" see Fitzmyer, "Anti-Semitism," 669 and n. 10 on the expression in the Hebrew Scriptures. Cf. Hans Kosmala, "'His Blood on Us and on Our Children' (The Background of Mat. 27, 24–25)," *ASTI* 7 (1968–69): 94–126. "His blood upon us" denotes bloodguilt, responsibility for wrongful shedding of blood, and implies disaster. Fitzmyer points to 2 Sam 1:16; 3:28–29; 1 Kgs 2:33; Josh 2:19 (MT); Jer 28:35 (LXX); Ez 18:13; Lev 20:9 (MT); *T. Levi* 16:3. Cf. Deut 19:10. 2 Sam 3:28–29 is illustrative: after Joab kills Abner in cold blood, David says, "I and my kingdom are forever guiltless before the Lord for the blood of Abner son of Ner. May the guilt fall on the head of Joab, and on all his father's house, and may the house of Joab never be without one who has a discharge, or who is leprous . . . or who falls by the sword." On the problem of bloodguilt see esp. Chapter 3.

²⁹ For an overview of the debate see Brown, *Death of the Messiah*, 831–39; Luz, *Matthew 21–28: A Commentary* (trans. Wilhelm C. Linss; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005), 501 with notes.

marks them as the newly constituted people of God: *καὶ ἐροῦσιν πᾶς ὁ λαός, Γένοιτο* (MT: *וְאָמַר כָּל־הָעָם אָמֵן*, Deut 27:16–26).³⁰

Its corporate use here need not be decisive, as the phrase occurs in the Hebrew Scriptures also in a more limited sense.³¹ In Deuteronomy 27, however – and this is striking – the final curse in the list of blessings and curses which Moses speaks to “all Israel” (Deut 27:9, 14) addresses the shedding of innocent blood: “‘Cursed be anyone who takes a bribe to shed innocent blood.’ All the people (*πᾶς ὁ λαός*) shall say, ‘Amen!’” (Deut 27:25). At the moment of the people’s decision to shed Jesus’ innocent blood, Matthew introduces the same phrase. The concinnity offers good reason to think that the phrase has here its full weight: Matthew includes not just the leaders but “the whole people” Israel in the decision to shed Jesus’ blood and its consequences.³² The difficulty with the *intra-muros* reading of 27:25 as it stands – the claim that 27:25 indicates only a limited judgment – is that this reading, too, is textually problematic. Matthew speaks of judgment in this passage, as even proponents of the *intra-muros* readings agree, and Matthew’s use of *πᾶς ὁ λαός* raises the possibility that the judgment is not limited.

Neither the ironic reading nor the limited judgment reading, then, is entirely satisfactory. Yet the wholesale condemnation of Israel which the *extra-muros* readings find in 27:25 makes nonsense of the Gospel’s announcement of a Messiah in the line of David (1:1–17) who offers salvation to “his people” (1:21, cf. 2:6). Matt 27:25 is problematic. How shall the opening promise of hope for Israel be fulfilled in the Gospel that comes to a climax with blood upon the people’s head? The verse has rightly had a place at the center of the debate about the meaning of Matthew’s gospel with respect to Israel. In structural terms, it is key: it constitutes the turn of the action of the trial. In moral terms also it demands to be reckoned with because, as Montefiore notes, it has been responsible for “oceans of human blood.”³³ And in theological terms it raises (with Paul in

³⁰ See also Josh 1:2, where the Hebrew makes the scope of “the whole people” clear: *ועתה קום עבר את־הירדן הזה אתה וכל־העם הזה אל־הארץ אשר אנכי נתן להם לבני ישראל*: “this people” is Israel. Cf. Deut 13:9; 17:13; Josh 7:24; Judg 20:8; 1 Sam 11:15; 12:18; 1 Kgs 8:38; 18:21, 24, 30, 39, etc.

³¹ All the people in an army, for instance, or the whole people of a city: e.g. Gen 35:6, 41:40; Exod 17:13; Num 21:33–35; Josh 7:3; 8:3, 5, 11 *et passim*; Judg 7:1, 6, 7 *et passim*; 1 Sam 13:22; 14 (4x); 2 Sam 2:28, 30; 3:31; 12:29, 31; Jer 41:10, 13 (LXX 48:10, 13).

³² Cf. Brown, *Death of the Messiah*, 837. For further discussion of the phrase *πᾶς ὁ λαός* see Chapter 7, “Innocent Blood and the Fate of the People.”